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Observations on
Dysentery

By Jonathan B. Kendall

of Virginia

The Author of this Essay has given a very excellent
view of the subject which he has chosen for his
Inaugural Dissertation. It fully meets my Ap-
probation, & I have consequently no question to
propose to him for further elucidation.

An Inaugural Dissertation
For
The Degree
of
Doctor of Medicine

submitted
to the examination of the
Reverend John Andrews D.D. Preost
Pro Tempore
The
Trustees & Medical Professors
of the
University of Pennsylvania.
by Powhatan B. Sindall
of Virginia -

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The subject that I have chosen for my Inaugural Dissertation, is that form of disease Nosologically called Dysentery.

This perhaps may, & will no doubt appear to some, a very trivial theme for an Essay upon such an important occasion; but when we come to advert to the fact, that this formidable disease prevails more or less, in almost every part of our country, we are naturally led to the conclusion that too much cannot be advanced, & that the inquiry of Physicians cannot be too sedulously devoted to an event, in which their own welfare, as well as that of the Public, is so intimately involved. —

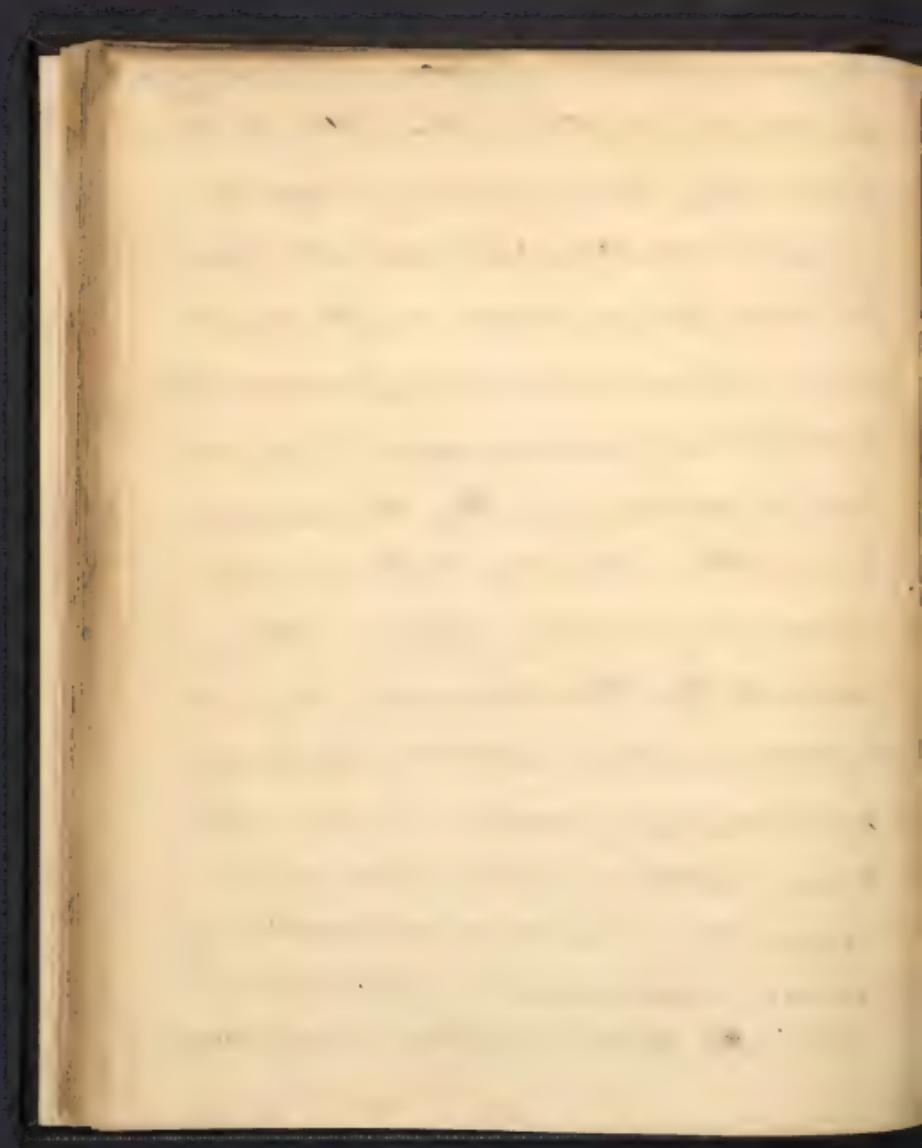
In treating of this disease, I shall not attempt any thing new, nor shall I trouble you with minute details of all the different theories that have been from time to time, so ingeniously advanced; these are subjects into which men of Genius are too often allured, & in the pursuit of which, they are too often led astray by the immeasurable flights of imagination. The arguments & theory which I shall advance will I hope be entirely of a practical nature, they shall consist of such facts as I have collected during my attendance on the Medical Lectures in the University of Pennsylvania. —

In treating of this disease, Dystentiy, I shall with my illustrious Preceptor

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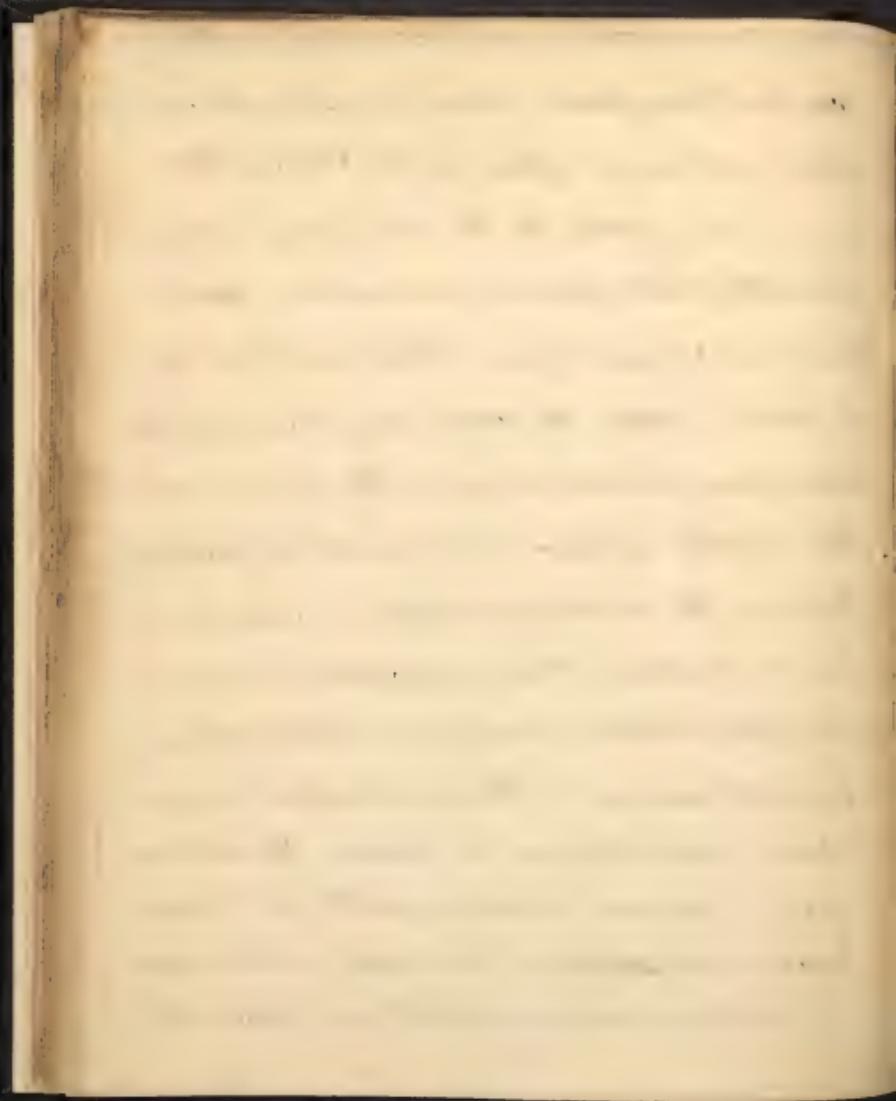
Dr Rush, consider it as an Intestinal
form of Fever, - the arguments upon which
I ground this opinion are as follows. It
occurs at those times, & in those states of the
atmosphere that are most favourable to the
generation of remittent & intermittent forms
of fever together with Diarrhaea, Bilious
Colic, & Cholera Morbus. It assumes a mild,
inflammatory, or malignant aspect accord-
ing to the causes that produce it, and other
circumstances. - Since the time of Dr
Sydenham, this form of disease has been
viewed as a Febris. h. trovera, whether this
view of the subject be correct I will not
undertake to determine, as it shall be
my chief object ^{to avoid} Speculation. That other

diseases are sometimes translated to the
Alimentary Canal producing Dysentery,
cannot be doubted, but such is the fact,
that every form of disease in attacking the
animal frame, invariably fixes upon that
part, that is most predisposed to take on
morbid excitement. Now the causes in-
ducing the Dysentery & the mode of its
appearance at least affords us strong as-
sumptions that the Alimentary Canal is
the part peculiarly acted on by the re-
mote & exciting causes. In short the
many instances of this form of Fever
being produced by an over proportion of
exercise, a full meal, or a glass of wine
& from the discharge of blood & other con-



disease, hence the frequency of Dysentery & other inflammatory diseases in the autumn particularly at those times when warm days succeed to cold & damp nights, when the heat of the body has been suddenly abstracted by the shifting of the wind from the south, or north east point of the compass. These sources of Dysentery occur every year in some part of the United States, & should never be overlooked by the skilful Physician, as they serve to guide him in his practice, & to enable him to attack the disease in its forming state. -

I have thus thought proper to make a few observations by way of introduction - From the view I have taken, you will re-

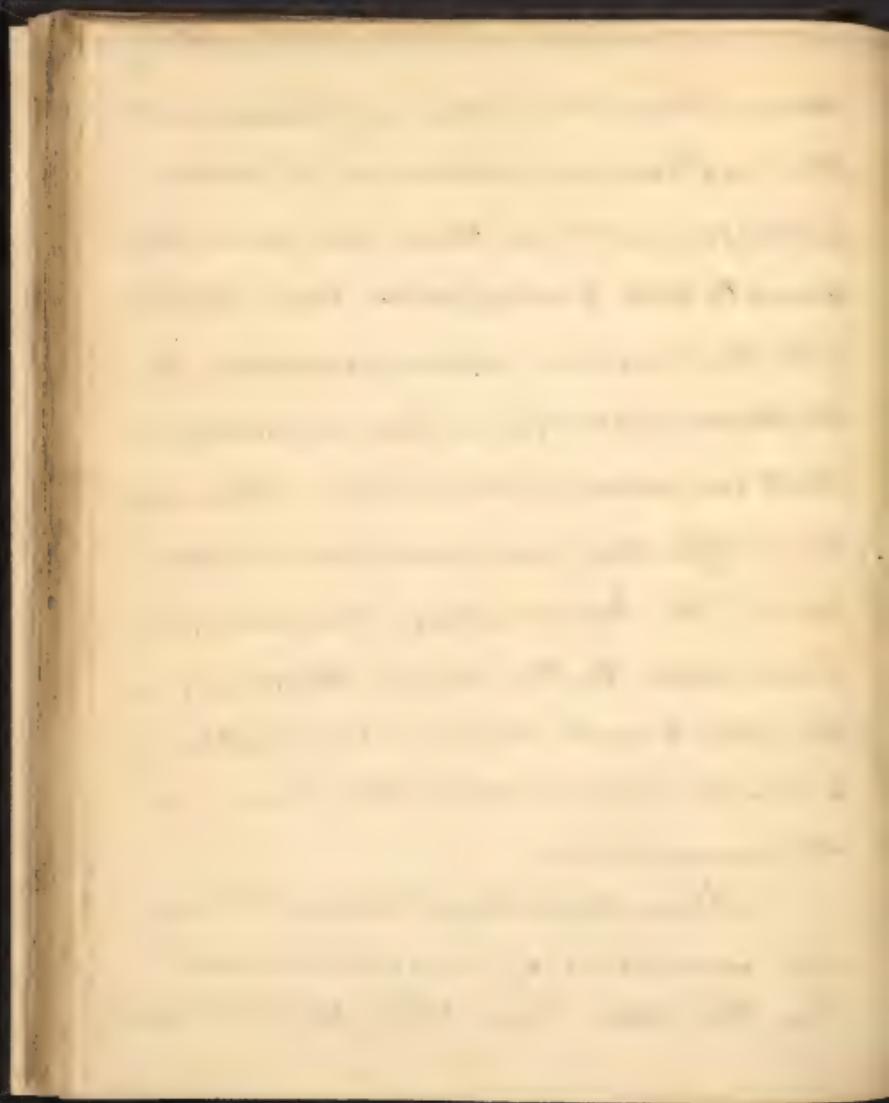


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dily perceive I am a strong advocate for the
unity of disease, I repeat again, I believe that
there is but one predisposing cause of Dysen-
tary, & that is debility, but one exciting cause,
& that is stimulus. All ordinary fever being
seated in the bloodvessels, it follows of course
that all those affections we call Dysentery,
Pleurisy &c are symptoms only of an Ori-
ginal & primary disease in the Sanguiferous
system. The truth of this proposition is obvious
from the above local affections succeeding pri-
marily Fever, & from their alternating so fre-
quently with each other. —

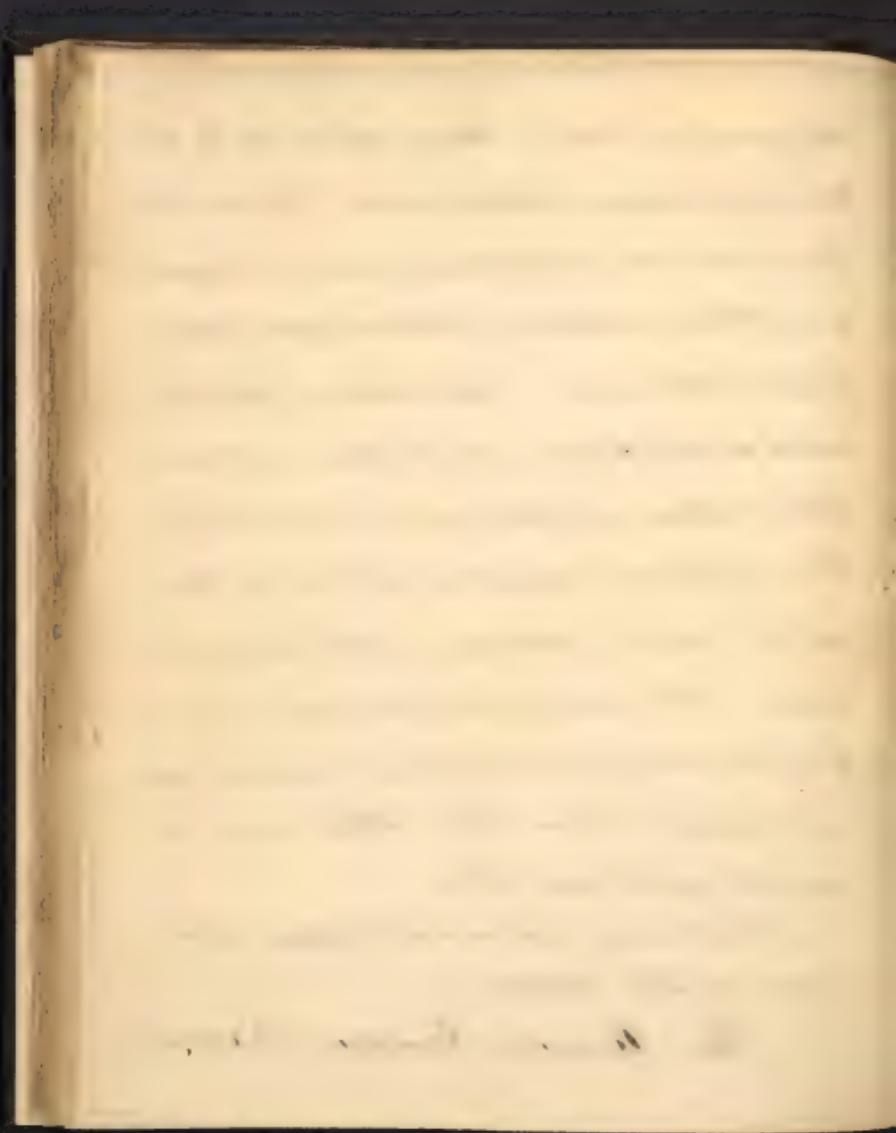
I shall now endeavour to speak of the
causes of this disease.

The Remote Causes of Dysentery



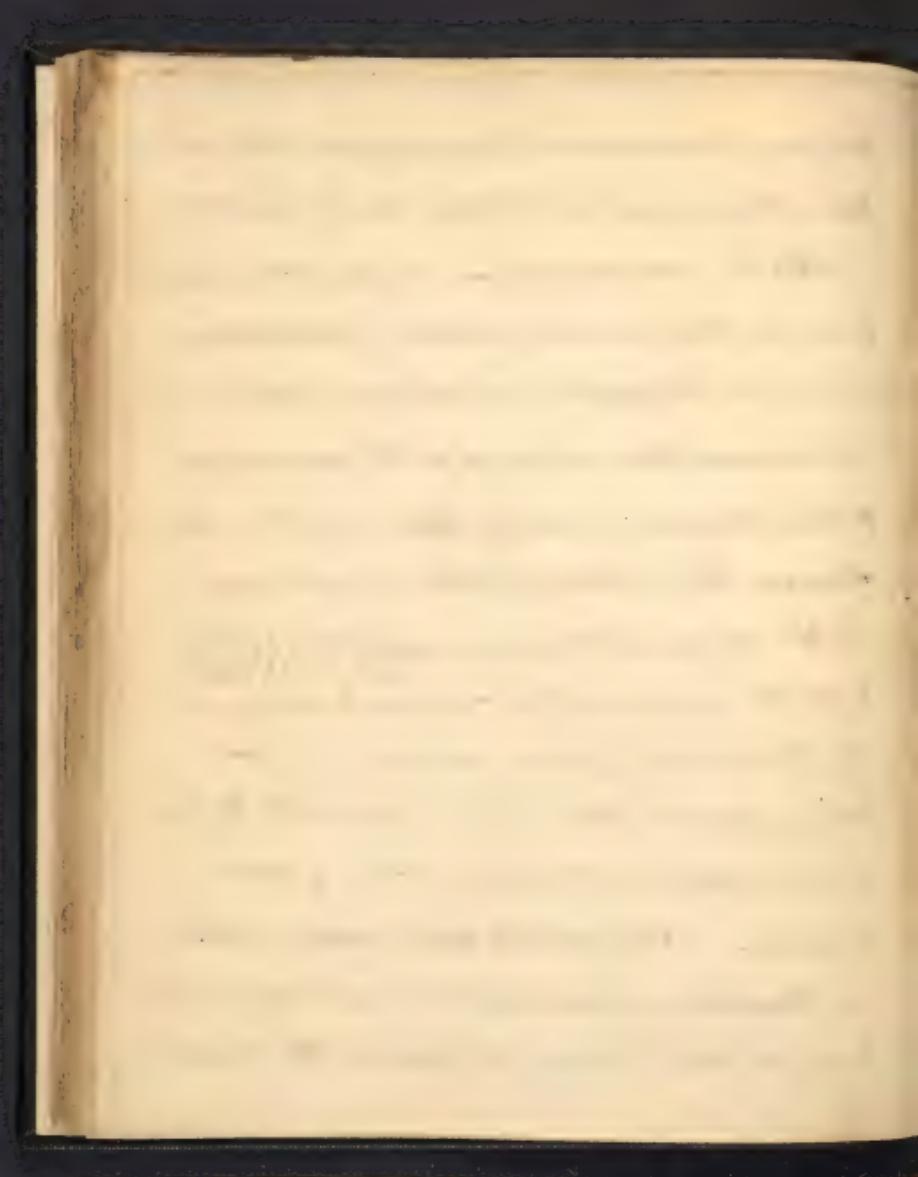
are very numerous, & various in their na-
ture, some of which I shall briefly mention.

Heat & Miasma in conjunction, appear
to be the chief remote causes of this disease.
When the atmosphere is excessively heated, &
at the same time charged with noxious par-
ticles, proceeding chiefly from vegetable sub-
stances, the secretion of bile as well as its ex-
cretion is generally increased, & this together
with its accumulated acrimony acting on
the alimentary Canal, induces in that
part a morbid state highly favourable to ir-
regular action on the application of exciting
power. A vegetable diet frequently indu-
ces Dysentery, probably it is not sufficiently
tonic & stimulating to preserve the natural

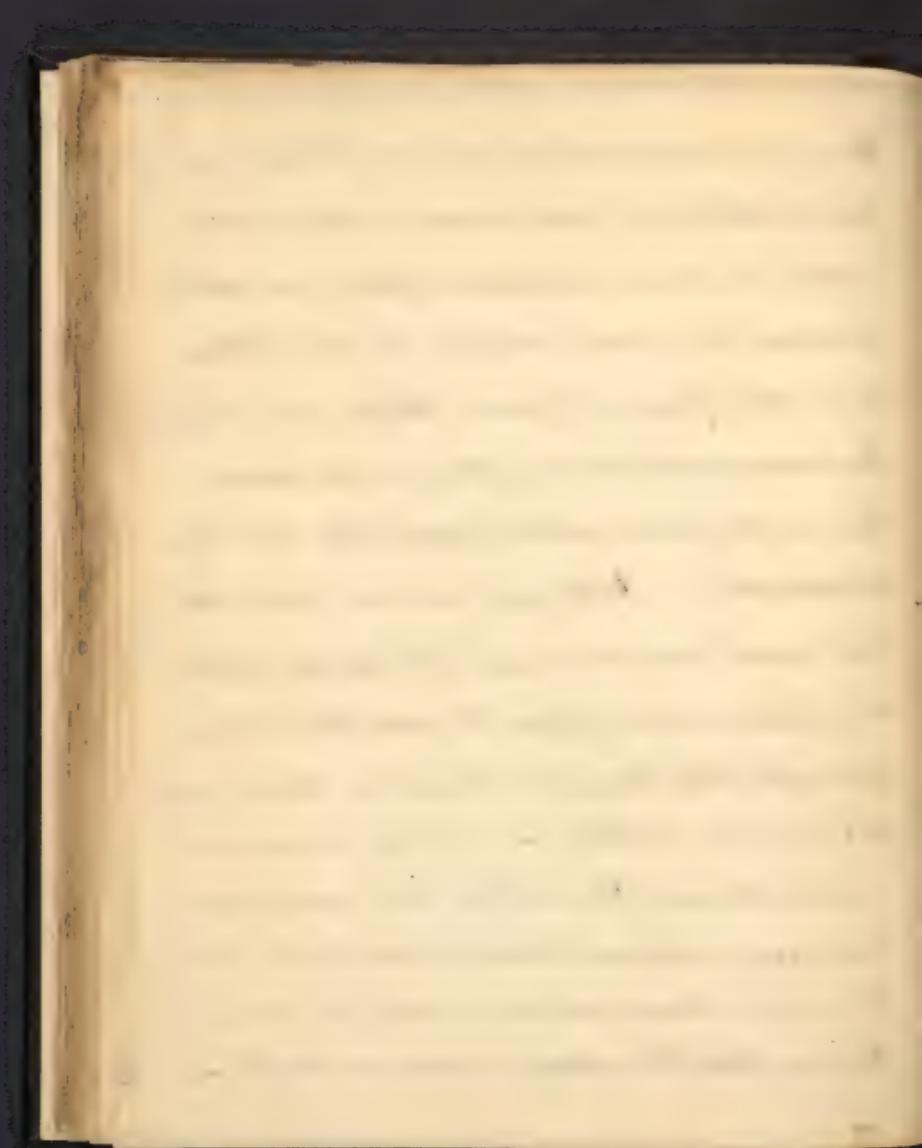


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tone of the alimentary canal, & hence gives rise to debility. Fresh animal after an individual has been accustomed to live on salted animal food, has a similar tendency to induce this form of Fever. Cold should also be enumerated among the remote causes, this acts by accumulating excitability & checked perspiration. — Contagion has been believed the most usual remote cause of Dysentery, that the effluvia arising from the excretions & more especially the Feces of a Dysenteric patient have acted as an exciting cause of this disease will not be denied, but whether the Dysentery is a contagious disease I will not undertake to determine. Many instances might be adduced to prove that this disease depends chiefly on



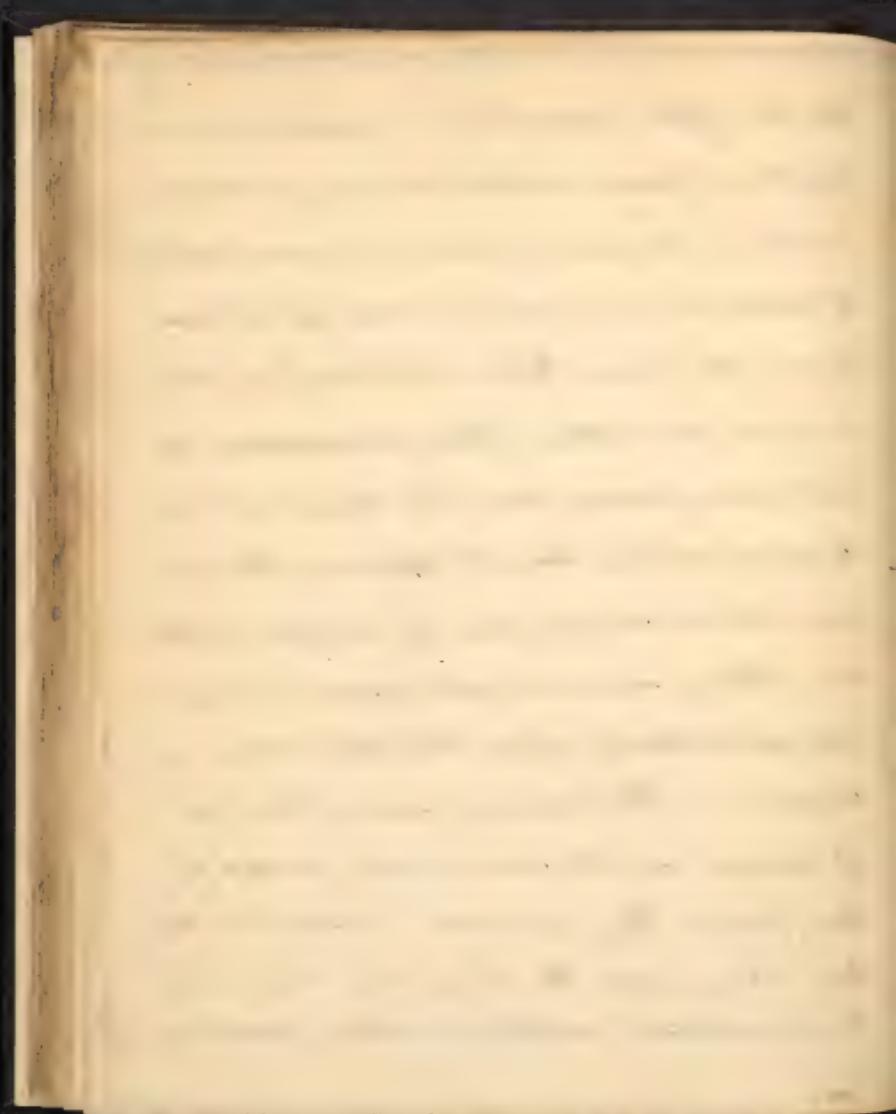
the State of the Atmosphere as respects its tem-
perature, & foreign matters it may accidentally
contain. The many instances of persons breathing
the same air, living on the same Food, & sub-
mitting the same kind of drinks from a simi-
larity in the nature of their constitutions, does
not by any means prove the disease to be con-
tagious, neither does its prevailing Families
prove that it is propagated by contagion, for the
same thing occurs in intermittent Fevers, &
who will dare to assert that the latter is con-
tagious. - The exciting causes of this form
of disease are the usual exciting causes of
other forms - They are such as act on the sys-
tem & increase the frequency & force of
the circulation without acting perniciously



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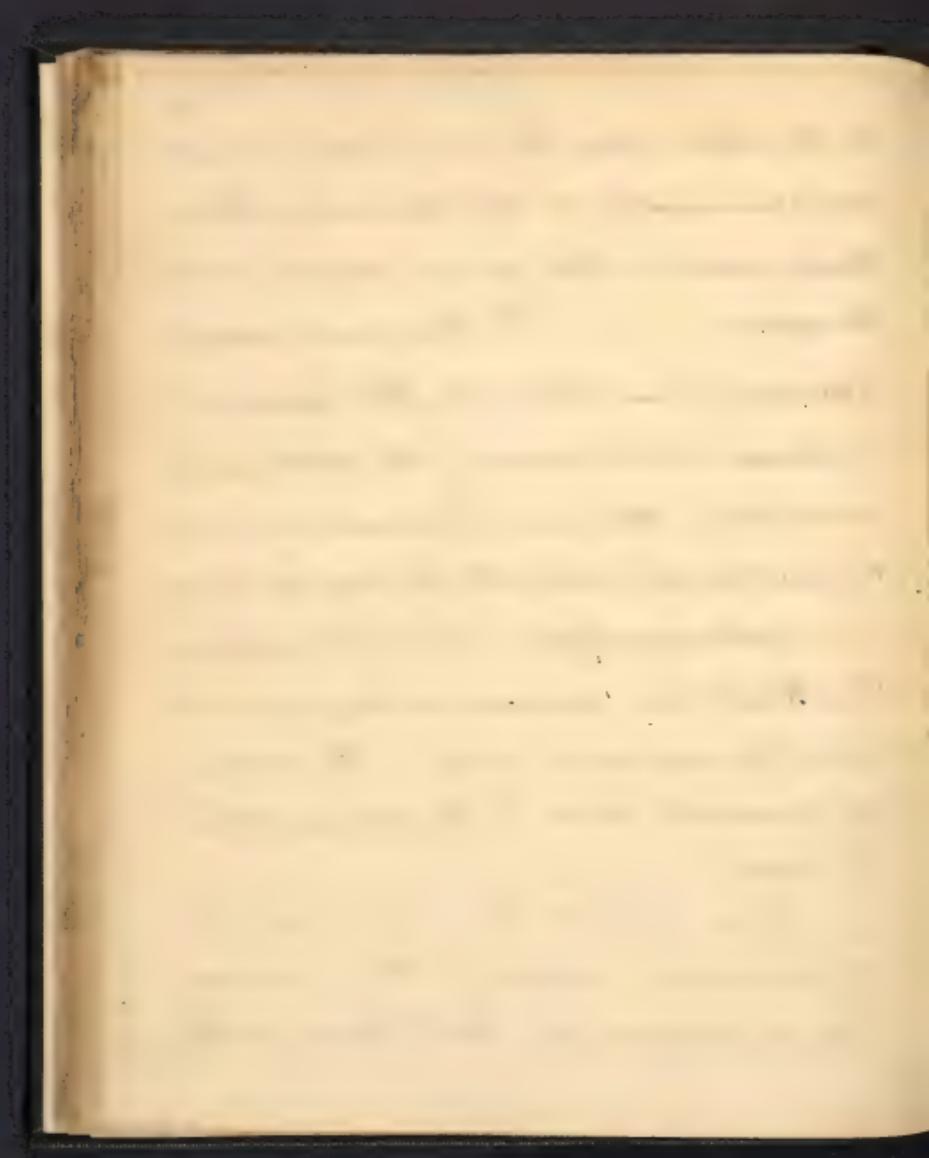
on the alimentary canal; & such as act
more immediately on the alimentary canal
thereby exciting their morbid influence over
the system. — The Proximate cause of
Dysentery was believed by Dr Cullen to
be Spasms - That spasms of the intestines do
accompany this form of disease will not
be doubted, but they shd be considered as
one of its symptoms & not its cause. —
Dr. Rees has pronounced morbid action
to be the proximate cause - He considers
the proximate cause & the disease to be
the same. —

Here I finish the remote, exciting
& proximate causes of this disease
I must acknowledge that I have omitted

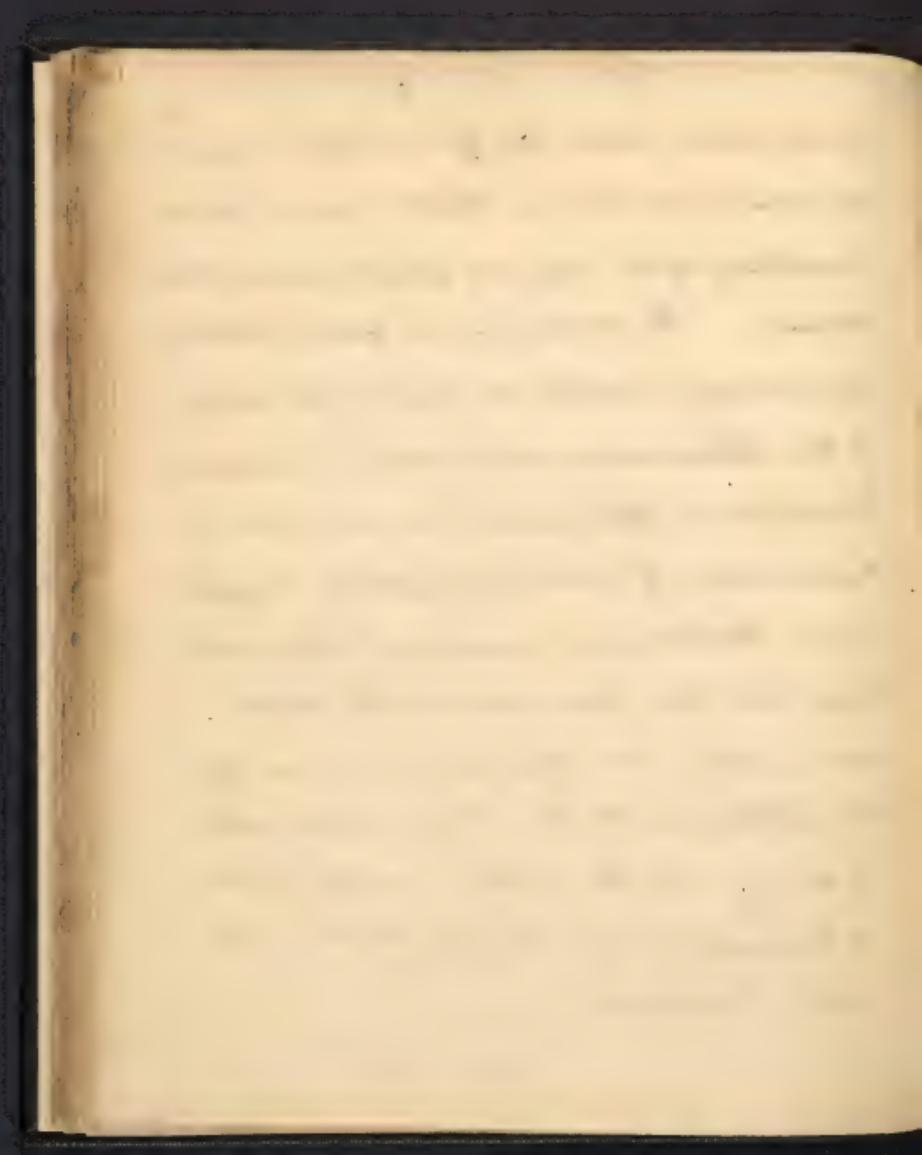


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many, but I hope the few I have enum-
erated will evince that I have a common
knowledge of the sources which produce the
disease. — The writer is not ashamed to con-
fess himself unable to account for many
of the Phenomena in the science of medicine.
The subject is still involved in much doubt
& intricacy, & it is only by study & applica-
tion that we can surmount these obsta-
cles; let then those prosecute the subject,
whose active & cultivated minds, are hap-
pily blessed with the divine prerogative
of diving into the hidden recesses of nature
& triumphantly dragging truth into
light & existence. —

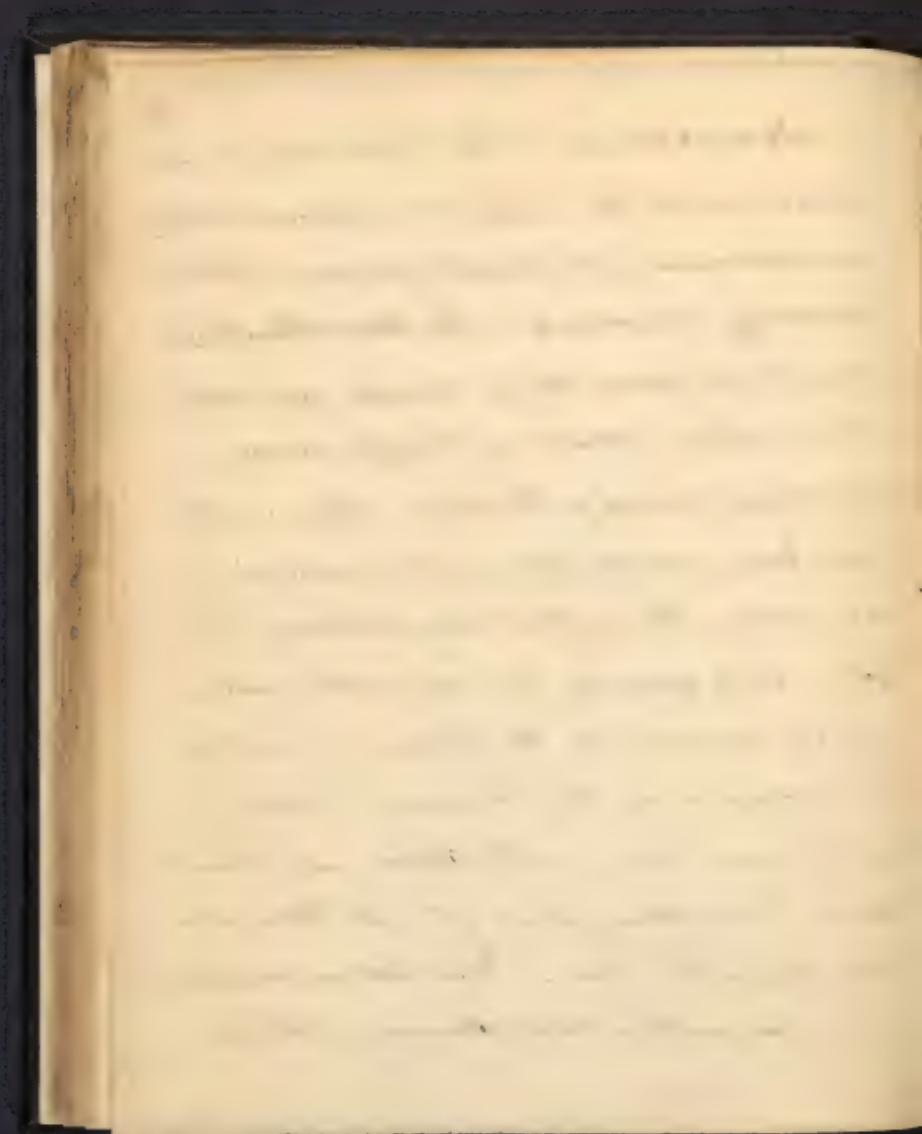


Symptoms. The Dysentery is a disease in which the patient has frequent stools, accompanied with much griping, & followed by Tenesmus. The stools though frequent are generally in small quantities & the smaller voided is chiefly mucus - sometimes mixed with blood. There is at the same time a suppression of the natural秘es, & when the patient does discharge his feces, it is generally of a compacted nature. The times at which this disease is most liable to occur is in the summer & autumn; at the same time with Autumnal Intermittents & remitting fevers; & with these it is sometimes blended. This disease sometimes comes on with a cold shivering, & other



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symptoms of paresis, but most commonly
the symptoms of the topical affection appear
first - The belly is costive with some degree
of flatulency in the bowels - Sometimes, though
more rarely, some degree of Diarrhoea is the
first appearance. In most cases the disease be-
gins with griping, & frequent inclination
to go to stool, indulging this, little is voided; but
incessancy attends it, by degrees the stools become
more frequent, the griping more considerable.
Along with these symptoms there is a loss of
appetite, & frequent sickness, nausea & vomiting,
also affecting the patient at the same time.
There is always more or less of paresis present
which appears either the remittent or intermit-
tent type. As the Dysentery advances, the

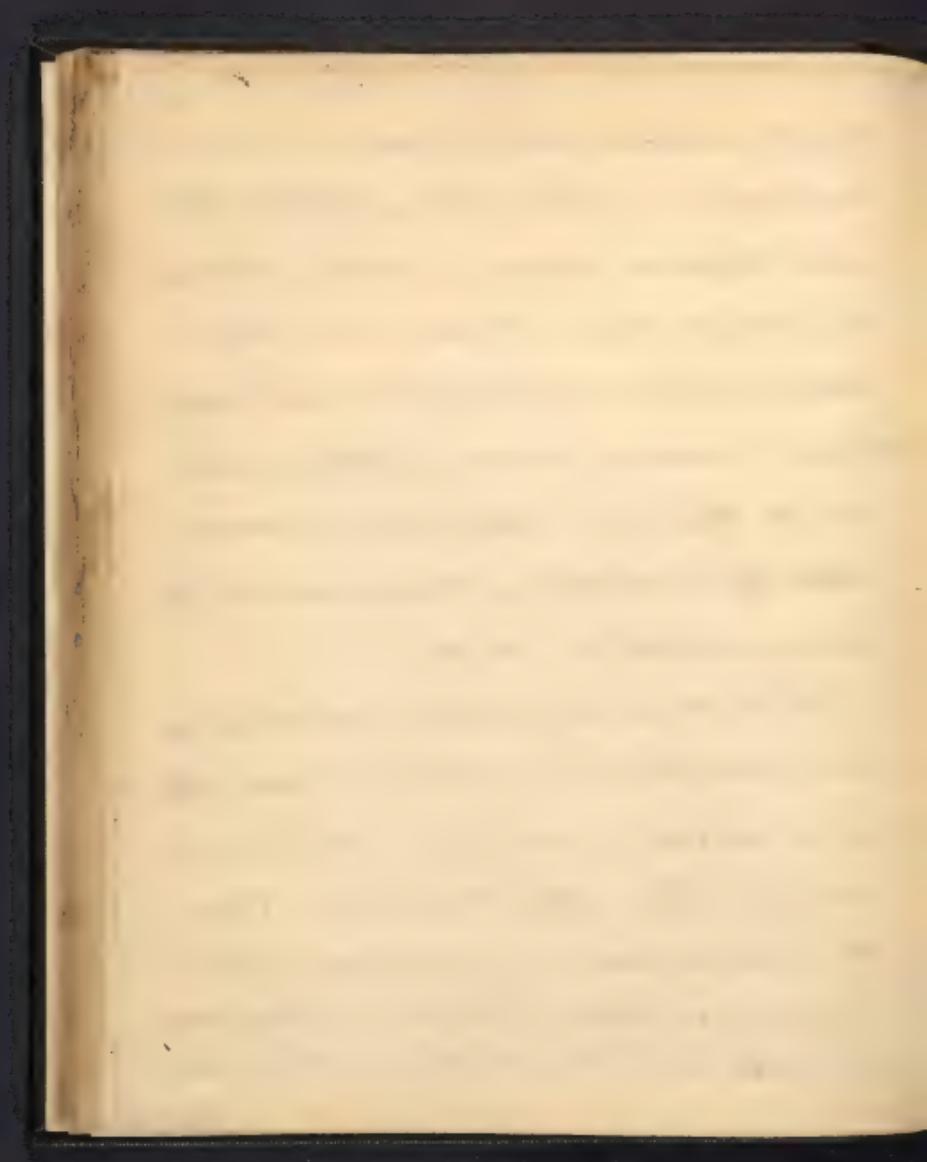


Symptoms enumerated increase in violence,
unless they be quickly subdued by the skill
of the Physician & powers of medicine, the last
& most fatal stage will soon arrive. This is
attended with a small & frequent pulse, black
tongue, sometimes a discharge of black matter
from the stomach, constantick griping, sometimes
a total loss of sensibility, extreme weakness, cold
extremities, & finally Death.

The matter discharged from the intestines varies in its appearance, consistence, & nature. Cases are sometimes discharged in the form of balls, of a firm yellow consistence. When the Dysentery commences with costiveness, this is a common result, & the pain in these cases is much more violent than in other cases.

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when this form of disease commences with laxity of the bowels, & is followed by a more immediate intestinal discharge. Sometimes the faces are fluid & intimately mixed with mucus, or streaked with blood. Sometimes there is a profuse discharge of mucus, unaccompanied with either faces or blood. Sometimes a discharge of gummy blood devoid of both mucus & faces. Sometimes there is apparently a membranous substance discharged which has been taken for a part of the intilous coat of the intestines, but upon examination appears to be nothing more than inspissated lymph or mucus. — I shall conclude this part of the subject with the morbid appearances of the intestines after death. — The following circumstances have been observed by Physicians

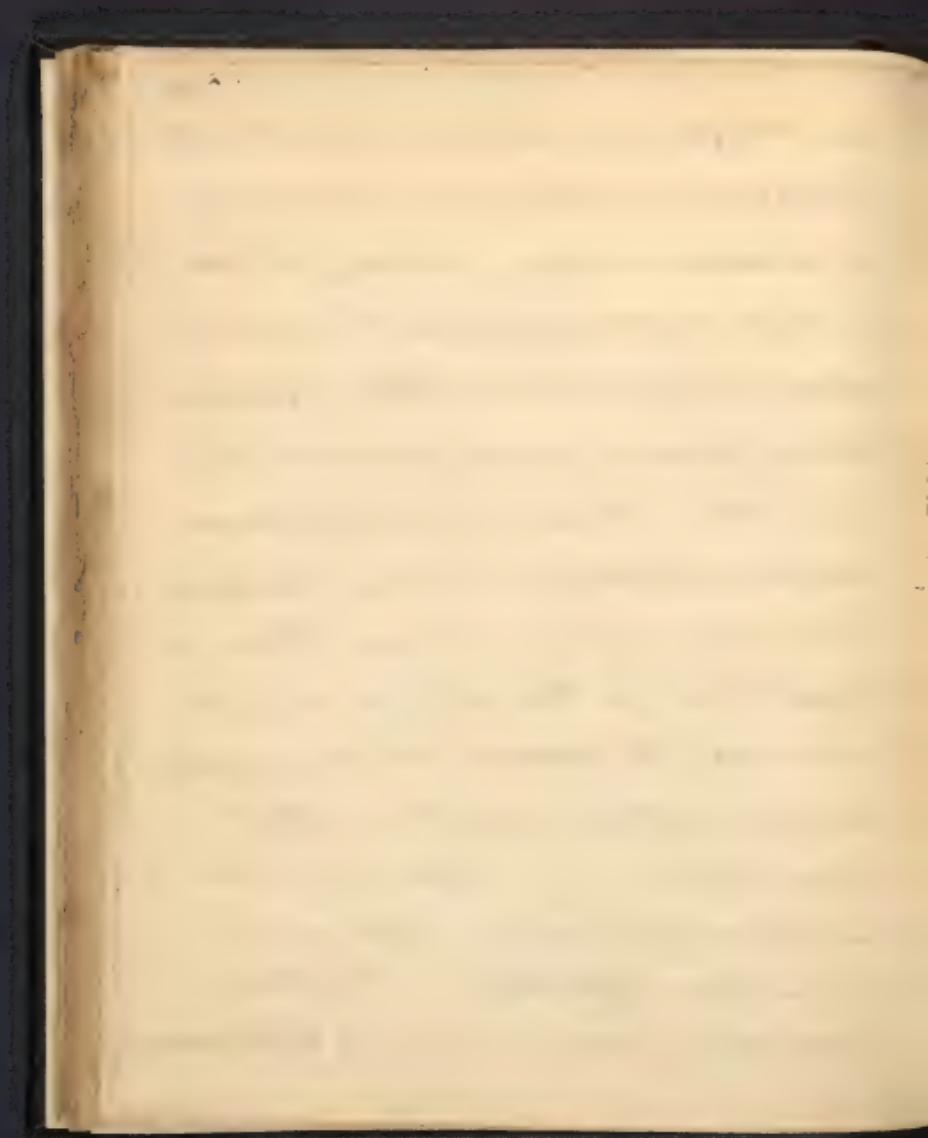


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on dissection. Inflammation, Pustules, Gran.
green, natural or no marks of inflammation
The last appearance may be considered as an
action transcending the inflammatory grade.
or point. Did time permit me, I might offer
remarks on all the different appearances of the
intestines, but as I have but little time allotted
me to prepare my dissertation, I must pass
over the subject for the present, & proceed in
the next place to the cure.

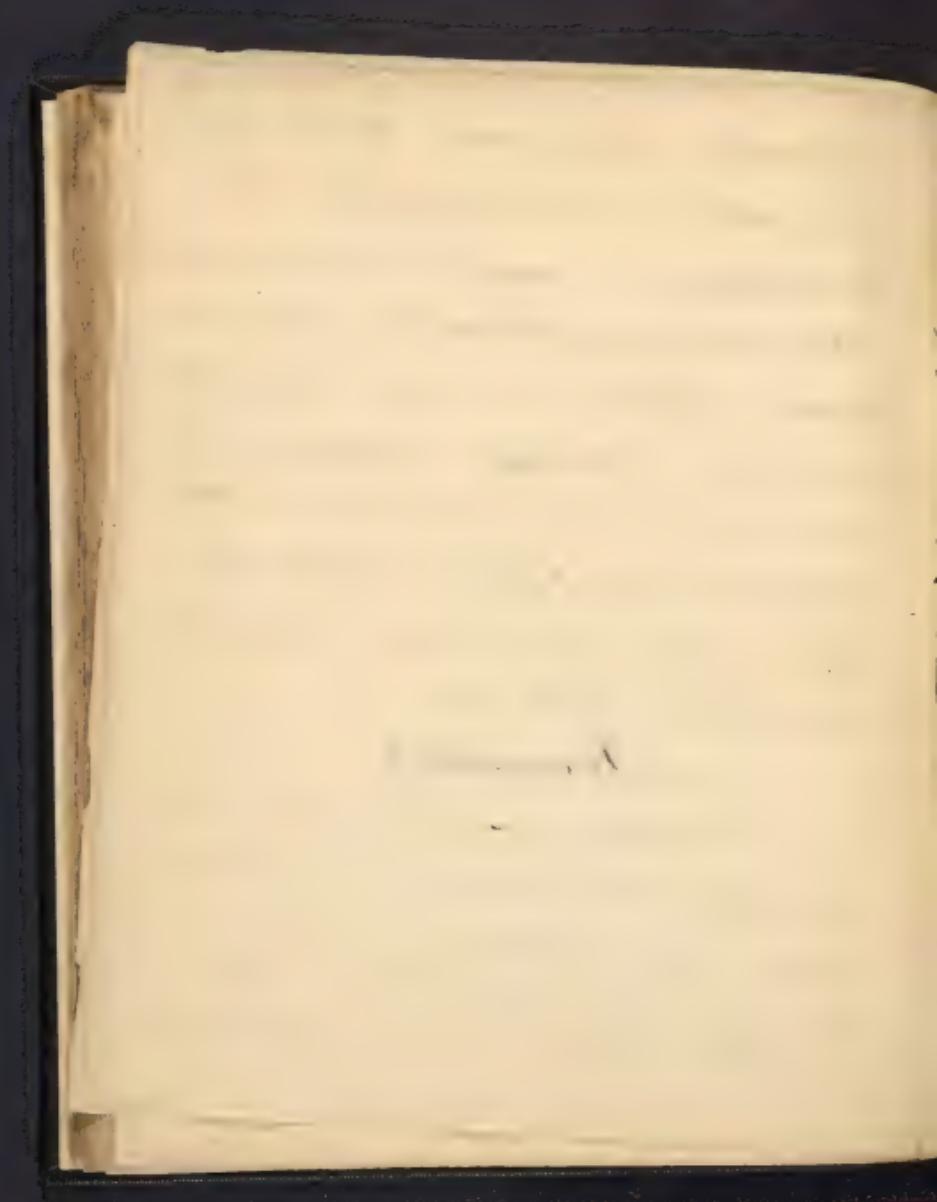
Remedies.

In establishing a method of cure it will
be necessary to pay attention to the state of the
system, & nature of the disease, as modified by
the causes inducing it, & the constitution of
the patient. When the disease is attended



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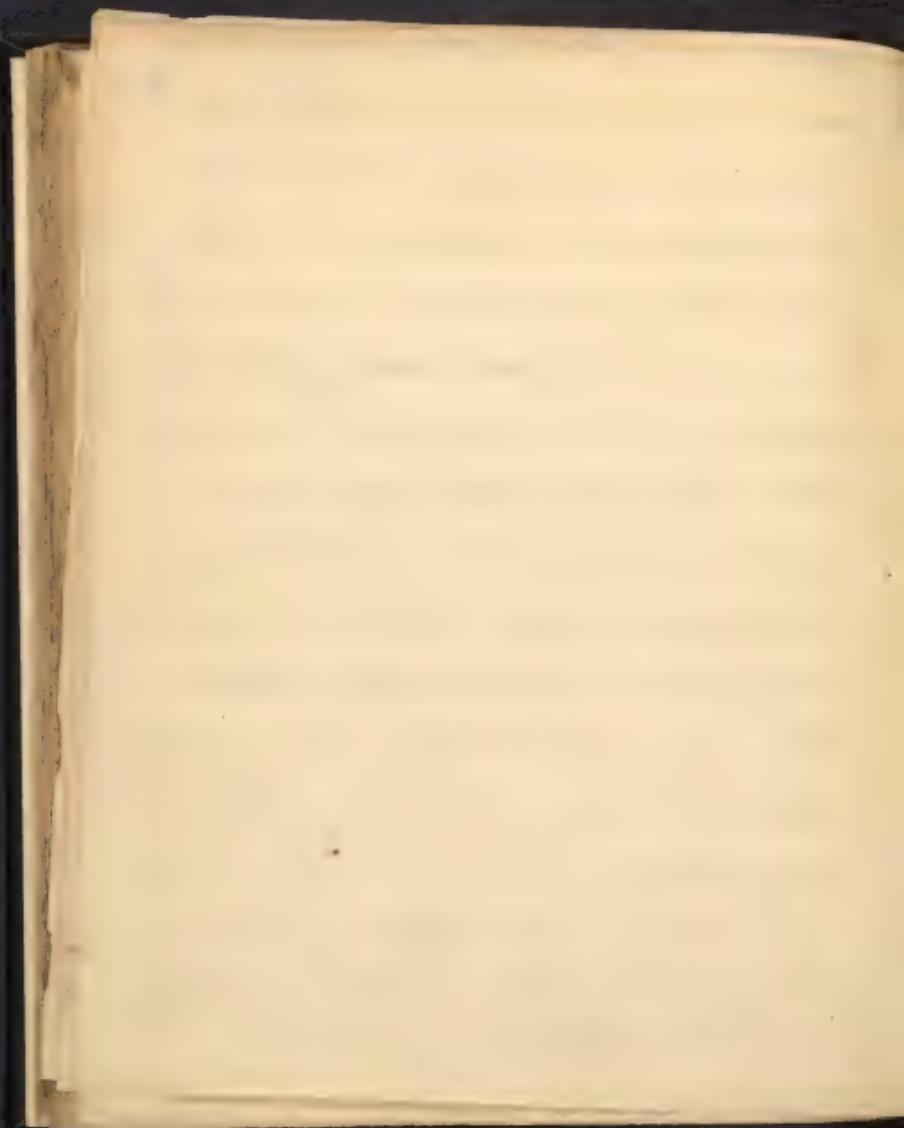
with violent inflammatory action, & when followed immediately after its commencement by a morbid pulse, bloodletting under such circumstances should always be advised. The many painful symptoms attending this form of Fever, as Torment, Tenesmus, & discharge of blood, seem to derive their degree of violence from the grade of irregular action prevailing in the sanguiferous System, & are more instantaneously removed by bloodletting, than by any other means we can employ. The quantity of blood to be drawn at one time, or the frequency of repetition in such cases must be entirely at the discretion of the Physician, who by attending to the state of the system will find it not very difficult to determine. But



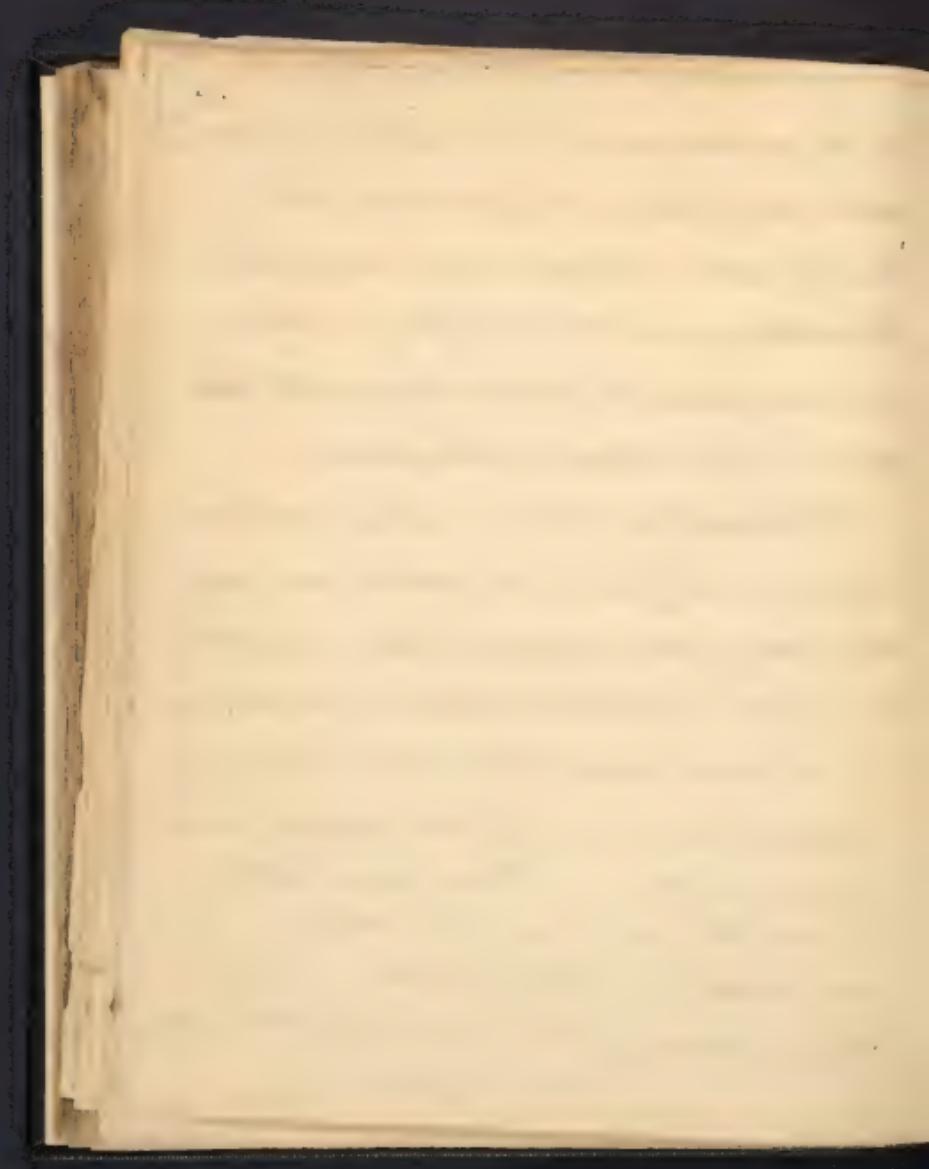
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in the mildest grade of this form of disease, when very little if any deviation from a healthy action is discoverable in the pulse, bloodletting will be unnecessary; & the most decided symptoms be relieved by a gentle cathartic, or a few drops of Laudanum.

The Dysentery sometimes appears under so malignant a form as to prohibit not only bloodletting, but every other form of depletion, in which the sedative effect of a simple purge has induced death. Here Bark, Laudanum, & Cordial drinks are especially necessary to support the system. It sometimes happens that the Stomach is very much deranged, as manifested by loathing of Food, nausea, bilious vomiting &c. here it has been cus-

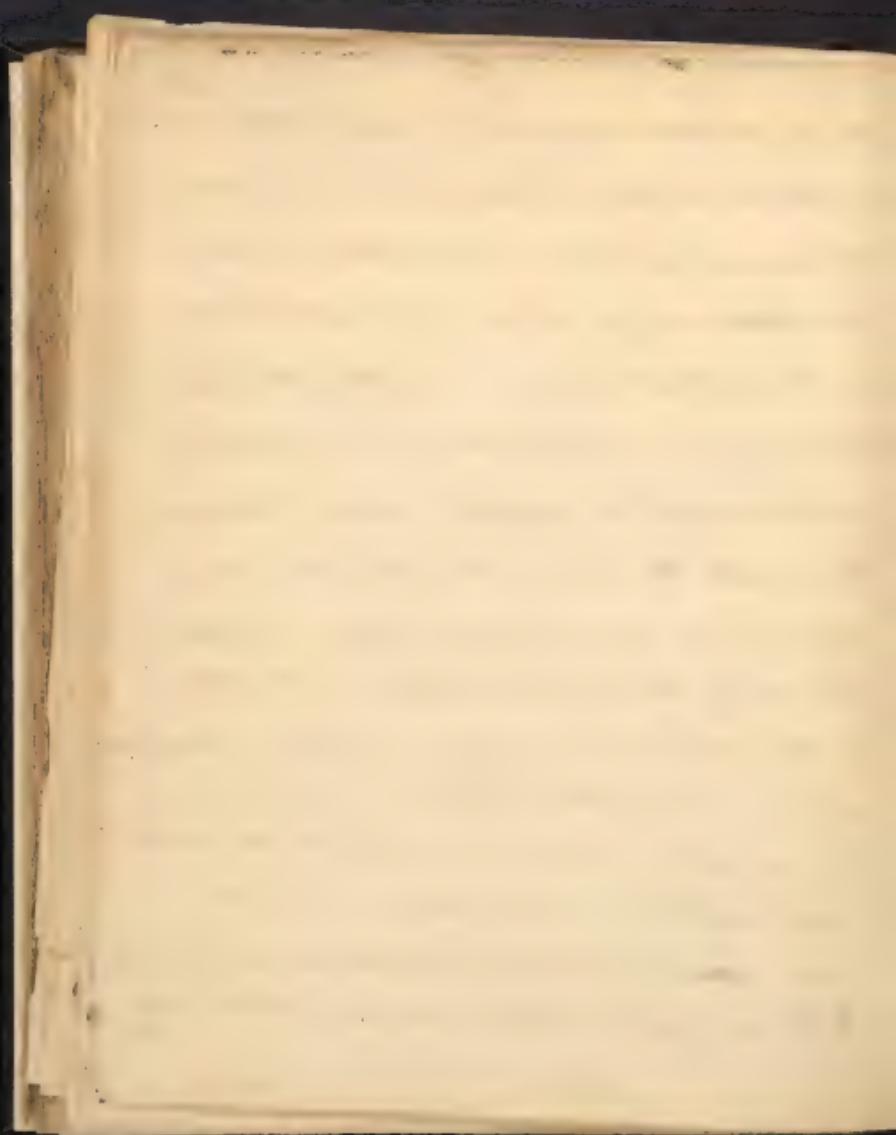


tonomy to have recourse to Tonics, & they will no doubt be found highly useful, but when the natural functions of the Stomach are but little impaired, as is frequently the case in the mildest states of Dysentery, they appear to be injurious, for the Stomach is disposed by emetics to put on irregular action, & to sympathize with the rest of the Alimentary Canal. I might go on & enumerate all the circumstances that render the exhibition of certain medicines in this disease pernicious & improper. I might indulge myself still farther, I might go on & even explain the operation of all the medicines exhibited in this disease; but such a view would far exceed the limits prescribed to the subject; I shall therefore content myself.



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self by mentioning a few of the most im-
portant medicines, & some circumstances to
be observed in their administration. It is very
rarely indeed that Cathartics may not be ad-
vantageously used in Dysentery. They are par-
ticularly well adapted to its removal, by com-
pelling the intestines to throw off a vast ac-
cumulation of sorbets & thereby relieve them-
selves from a constant & painful source of
irritation. Those cathartics that procure suf-
ficient evacuation without acting powerfully
on the intestines, which are at this time in a
highly excitable state, have been employed with
the greatest advantage. The following have
been found useful. Glauber's Salts, Castor
Oil, Rhubarb & Calomel. The Rhubarb



should never be given in the commencement of Dysentery, as it possesses astringent & tonic qualities, & would have a consequent tendency to increase the disease. When the Dysentery assumes a highly inflammatory grade, & powerful means are requisite to check its rapid progress, Calomel has been, & still may be used with infinite advantage. -

We come in the next place to make a few observations on the use of Sudorifics in Dysentery. When the disease has a tendency to pass off by the skin, sudorifics in such cases may be used with evident good effect. Ipecacuanha for this purpose has been recommended in small doses, so as to keep up gentle Diaphoresis.

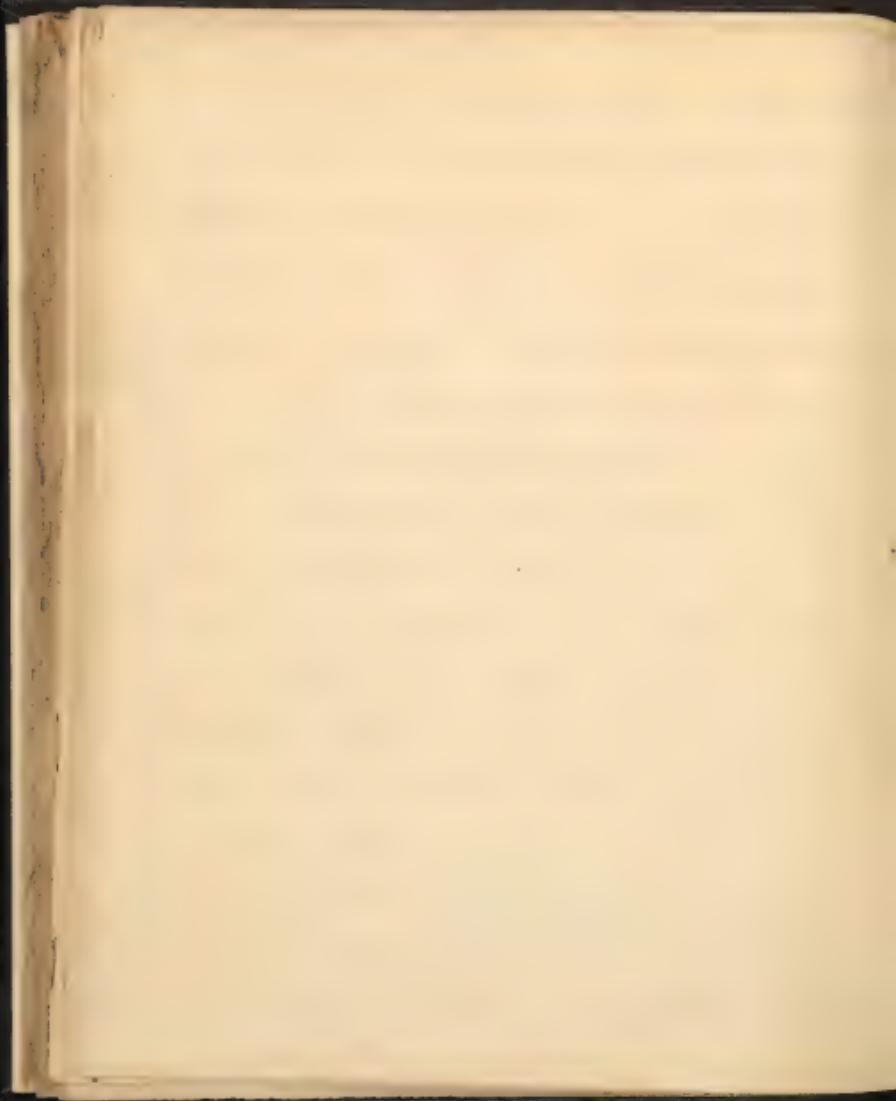


8 gr Ipecac: 4 of Opium & Creata 24 gr: made
into 8 powders, one to be taken 3 or 4 times a
day, has been used with good effect by Professor
Watson. For the purpose of relieving pain by
cleansing the bowels, & blunting the acrimony
of the accumulated torches, demulcents & mu-
cilaginous drunks should be plentifully used -
and when the violent inflammatory symp-
toms run high, & when the spasms of the
intestines are frequent & violent, injections
should be administered. They should be of
the mildest kind such as Flaxseed Tea, Harch,
sweet oil, &c but when the disease puts on
a fever of the malignant nature, the injec-
tions should be powerfully stimulating, as
 Laudanum combined with Harch, Barley wa-
 ter & Sweet oil & laudanum form an

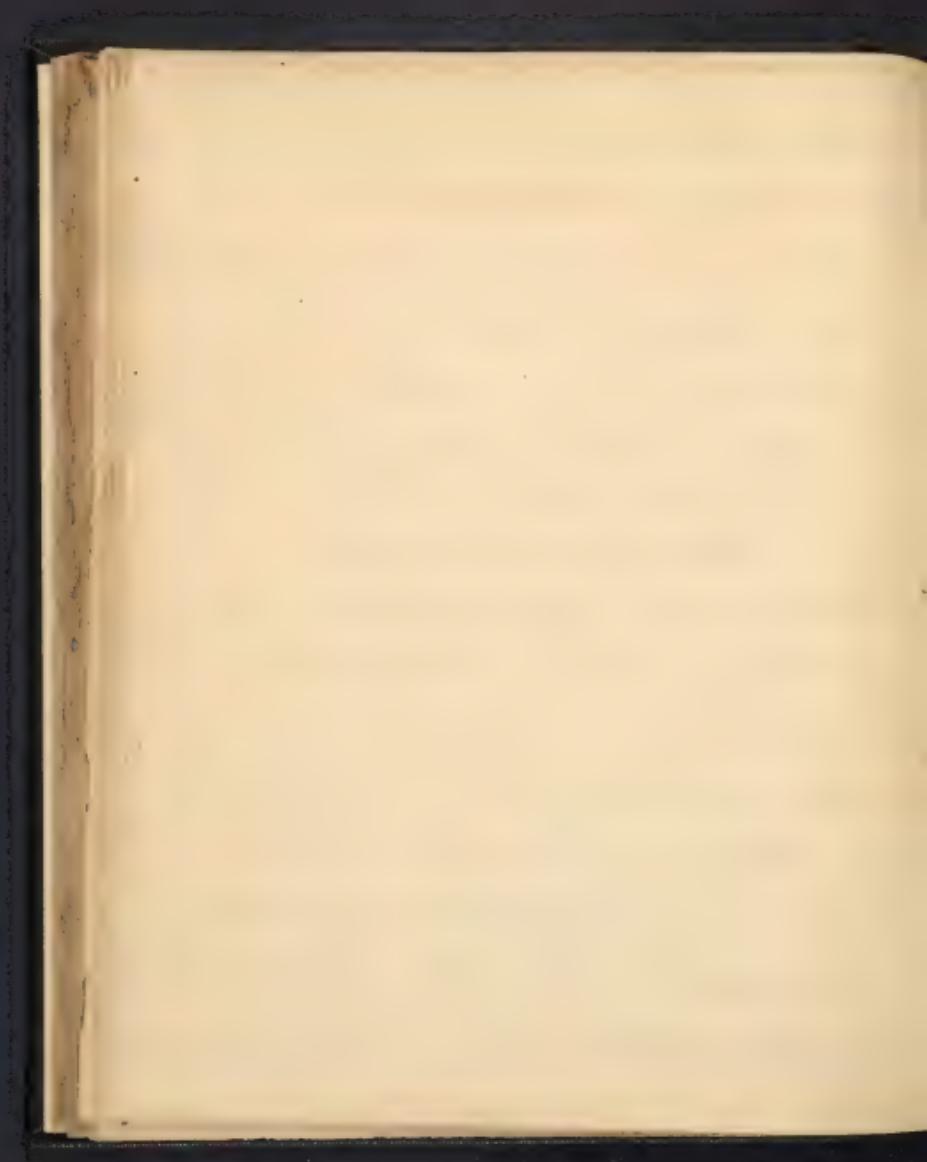


injection that seldom fails to remove the most distressing abdominal pains. After the inflammatory symptoms have been subdued, or when the disease appears under so malignant a form as to render depletion improper, Opiates should be given; & if the Stomach be too weak to bear them. Laudanum should be thrown up the rectum.

Blisters in some stages of this disease have acted like a charm, probably they prove serviceable by causing a translation of morbid excitement from one part of the system to another. Before using them the most strict attention should be paid to the grade of morbid action in the system; they should be applied to the wrists & ankles in pre-



ference to the abdomen, they prove equally serviceable, & are attended with fewer distressing consequences. — In cases of extreme debility, either from the long continuance, or the malignancy of its nature, blisters & cataplasmas are indispensably necessary. The Bark & wine should be administered freely. When the Dysentery follows ^{upon} the Intermittent type, or when the accompanying pains have a periodical occurrence, bark alone may be given with peculiar advantage. — — — The acute Dysentery sometimes runs into the Chronic state, in the treatment of which we should be governed by the state of system, as to what medicaments should be used. The tonic & stimu-



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ulating plan is pretty generally the proper one, but when the Tonics & Stimulants fail a salivation sh^d be resorted to. — The acute Dysentery likewise runs into other forms of disease, such as Typhus or low State of Fever in this case the Patient sh^d be supported by Stimulants, such as Laudanum, cordial alements & drinks. —

I have at length finished my Essay on this important subject. I have no other apology to offer for its errors & imperfections, than my age & limited experience. — The Science of Medicine is truly delightful & grand; to Fan the bed, overwhelmed in misery, by sacred Friendships gentle Hovst accumulated Coughs, is certainly one of

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The sweetest callings of Social man.—
To do this shall constitute my chief de-
light for the time to come. —

With these observations accept Gen-
tlemen, Professors in the University, of
Pennsylvania, collectively & individually,
the best wishes of a sincere friend. —

Pawhatan B. Tindall.

